

**ZLATOGRAD COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

**INTERVIEW GUIDELINES
AND RESULTS**

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ZLATOGRAD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER INTERVIEW GUIDELINES AND RESULTS

I. Preliminary Conditions and Objectives

During September 1997 the residents of Zlatograd participated in a series of interviews to evaluate the role, functions and success of the activities of the Community Development Center (CDC). The goal of the interviews was also to define priority areas of future development of the CDC supported by the public and to increase the efficiency of the Center. The above goal was based on the presumption that objectives, existing capacities and public support for future priorities are the foundation on which the CDC could build its immediate future.

The interviews were kept informal to avoid complicated questions and to elicit information more easily from the public. The aim was to learn of the every day problems of a well- organized community due to its geographical isolation and due to events such as the 1996 flood.

Three different focus groups were selected in advance according to the task set, and the questions were divided into three sections. The slight difference in questions presented to each particular group reflects distinctions in the status and different levels of access to information characterizing each particular focus group. The final analysis aims at considering these distinctions but determining common ground for intended future developments at the CDC.

The sections (focus groups) were selected as follows*:

Section A. City Council and municipal administration. Number of interviewees: 20

Section B. Non-representative group of citizens. Number of interviewees: 30

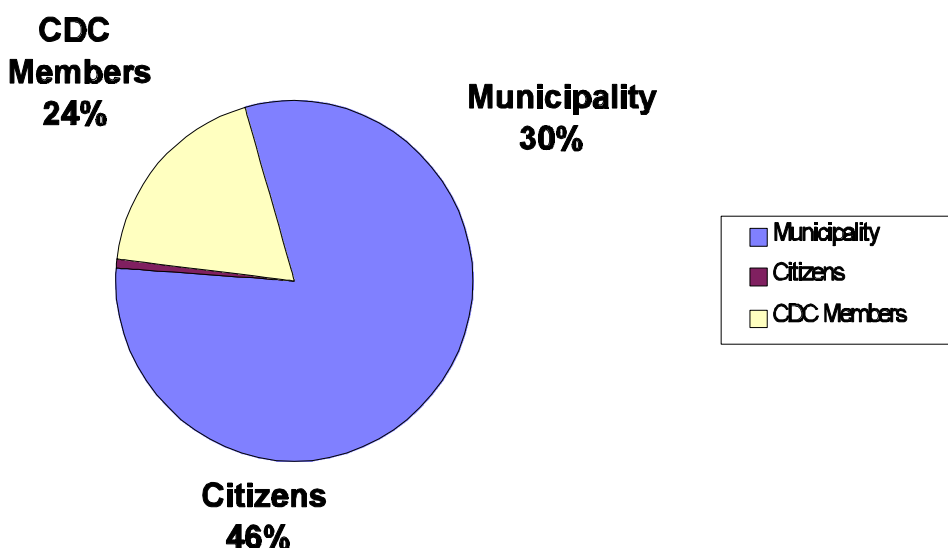
Section C. CDC association members. Number of interviewees: 16, representing 80 percent of all members.

The survey considered the opinion of 66 people in a municipality of not more than 15,000 inhabitants. It must also be considered that since the municipal administration and CDC association members are the general decision-makers concerning the CDC's

City Council and Municipal administration and CDC Association members were approached with written questionnaires and responded in writing, while citizens responded verbally.

undertakings, the relative weight of those two focus groups is higher. The pie chart below presents the relative weight of each focus group interviewed.

Relative weight of different focus groups interviewed.



II. Results of the Interviews

Section A: Interviews with Representatives of the City Council and Municipal Administration

Of the above, 78 percent confirmed being very well acquainted with the activities of the CDC, while 22 percent were somewhat familiar with them. As far as actively cooperating with the CDC, 89 percent have worked with the CDC on various issues. Out of that group, 89 percent of the municipal staff that has worked with the CDC believed that their involvement significantly helped to solve the particular problem, and 11 percent think the help of the CDC was relatively useful. The answers to the first two questions show that the municipal staff recognizes the significant role of the CDC in the community.

For the question regarding the CDC's relative advantages, the interviewees were allowed to choose more than one response. Of all interviewees, 24 percent considered "the professional approach of CDC employees" as its greatest advantage, 20 percent chose "the CDC's opportunities to attract and distribute financial assets", 17 percent shared the opinion that "informational assets and opportunities to attract external consultants for solving local problems" are invaluable, and "CDC popularity" was crucial for 14 percent. Most strikingly, "the opportunity to work closely with the Municipality" and

“the exchange of experience with other NGOs” were considered the least important advantages of the CDC. These results show that the municipal staff either consider cooperation between official local government and the CDC to be something very natural, or they underestimate its importance, or believe it has not reached the desired level of importance. The next questions shed some light on these responses.

A further conclusion drawn from this first set of questions is that priority is given to the professionalism and financial opportunities used by the CDC. This truly reflects the pragmatic approach of the interviewees when exploring means to solve local problems.

The next question asked about “ways to achieve greater efficiency in the future work of the CDC.” Again, each person interviewed had the opportunity to choose more than one response. The results of the previous question were supported by these answers. Twenty-four percent of the interviewees believed the CDC’s activities need “greater publicity” and 24 percent saw the need for “an increased number of public discussions on problems to be solved” as the most important goals. “The interaction and cooperation between the CDC and the Municipality” and “the increase of the capacity of the CDC, both in terms of finance and manpower” each received 19 percent. “Cooperation between the CDC and Municipality” was given a relatively low weight as a relative advantage of the CDC but a relatively greater weight as means of increased efficiency, which confirms the assumption that the Municipality believes there is much to be done to activate the cooperation between the two institutions. This is potentially a main objective for the future of the CDC. On the other hand, the CDC has obviously gained considerable independence from the government bureaucracy in solving community problems. Achieving the right balance between independence and coordination with the municipality is a challenge the CDC must soon face.

According to the interviewees, attracting more external professional advice is also an important way to increase CDC efficiency. This may be considered to be of less importance than other issues due to the Center’s already well-established practice of attracting external consultants.

The interviewees considered the following areas future priorities of the CDC:

- To work with private businesses (22 percent)
- “To act as a forum for citizens’ ideas”, and “to act as a center for developing regional development strategies” (18 percent each)
- To attract foreign investors, and to serve as a data bank (14 percent each)
- To involve citizens and to act as a liaison with the municipal administration (11 percent)

Analysis of the above results shows quite clearly that the attitude of the Municipality towards the CDC is once again quite pragmatic. The Municipality will continue to work on the administrative tasks planned under the previous regime, while the CDC is accepted as a new structure, whose task is to involve private businesses in solving municipal problems and to encourage businesses to contribute to the development of a sound economic environment.

To support the previous question, the interviewees were asked to consider how the quality of services offered by the CDC can be improved. Respondents were able to choose more than one answer. The results were:

- “By attracting more business consultants and investors” (32 percent)
- “By expanding the capacity of the Center both by increasing staff and diversifying services offered” (23 percent)
- “By improving cooperation with local government” (23 percent)
- “By improving and increasing the technical capacity of the CDC” (18 percent)

Section B: Interviews with the CDC Association Members.

Of the members of the CDC association, 63 percent consider the work achieved to have been good, and 37 percent define it as “relatively good.” No negative appraisals were given.

According to its members, the strongest advantage of the CDC is the “capacity to attract and involve external and foreign advisors” (33 percent), which rated second with the municipal staff. In this instance the “professional approach of CDC employees” and “cooperation with the Municipality” were rated second, with 20 percent each.

There is a certain gap between the opinion of the first two groups of interviewees in regard to the issue of “cooperation with the Municipality.” While CDC members consider cooperation with the Municipality to be a strong advantage, with the underlying idea that this cooperation is efficient, municipal employees seem to consider this cooperation not sufficient to meet the needs of the community, as shown in Section A. The results of the interviews make it difficult to estimate which group needs to make additional efforts to improve the relationship between the CDC and the Municipality. Both parties should probably undertake such efforts.

The “informal approach to problems” was rated third as a relative advantage of the CDC (13 percent) and “integrity of solutions” was rated last (7 percent) together with “other” advantages (7 percent).

Regarding achieving better efficiency in the work of the CDC, its members consider that the priorities are:

- Improved joint action with the Municipality (30 percent)
- More “publicity” and “more financing opportunities and more personnel” (20 percent each)
- More discussions and more external consultants (15 percent each)

As seen from the above results, answers are reversed here as compared to answers in the relevant questions of Section A. Obviously the Municipality and the CDC accept joint action of the two institutions to be crucial for their success. However, the CDC seems to consider the present state of cooperation decent and the future improvements in cooperation very important. The Municipality, however, considers current cooperation to be at a relatively less important. Improving this is considered important, but not as much as other issues, such as publicity and discussions. This can be explained by the greater passivity on part of the Municipality and by the lack of sufficient potential of the CDC compared to the Municipality.

The interviewees considered the following areas to be the most important future priorities of the CDC:

- To serve as “a center for developing regional development strategies” (25 percent)
- To “work with private businesses”, “attract foreign investors”, and to “serve as an information data bank” (19 percent each);
- To serve as “a forum for ideas of citizens” (6 percent);
- To serve as a place for involving citizens and to act as a liaison with the municipal administration (0 percent).

It is striking that the approach within the CDC association is even more pragmatic and oriented to economic development issues than that of the Municipality. This is due partly to the predominance of economic issues in the current activities of the CDC and partly to the established needs of the community, especially after the flood. On the other hand, there appears to be a certain tendency to ignore the importance of citizens’

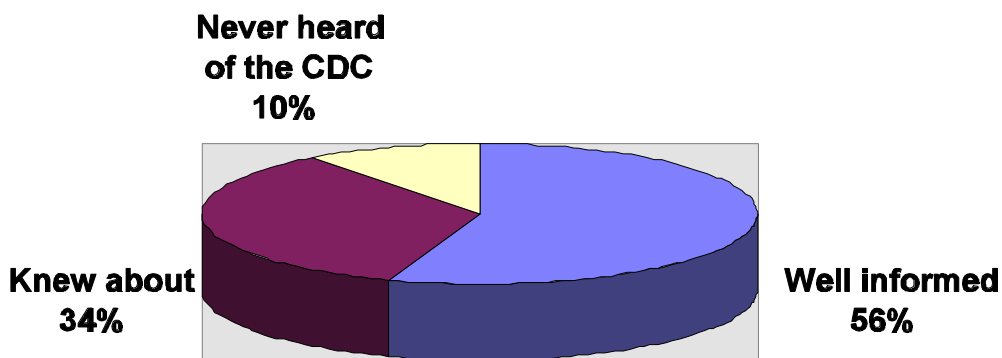
opinions, which should be changed in the near future. The existence of such a tendency can be seen in Section C responses.

Section C: Interviews with a non-representative group of citizens.

Of the citizens interviewed, 17 percent customarily use services offered by the CDC, and 41 percent use these from time to time. This can be considered a good percentage despite the fact that the interviews were not fully representative. Of the citizens that have used the services, 94 percent are fully satisfied with the quality, and 6 percent are partially satisfied. This is also a fair percentage. When evaluating these results, however, it must be considered that the greatest number of customers have used purely technical services offered by the CDC, such as copying, translations, and e-mail access.

On the other hand, the CDC is granted overwhelming acceptance and support by the community, which is demonstrated by looking at the answers to Question 3 of Section C: "Are you aware of the existence of the Zlatograd CDC and do you approve of its existence?" All 30 of the citizens interviewed approved of the CDC, and only 1 (3 percent) did not know of its existence and did not approve of it once it was explained; two other citizens (7 percent) did not know about its existence but after being informed approved enthusiastically. On the whole, 56 percent of the interviewees said they were very well informed about the CDC's existence and fully approved of it; 34 percent knew something about the CDC and approved of it. An approval rating of 90 percent is very high, of which the CDC can be proud. (See pie-chart).

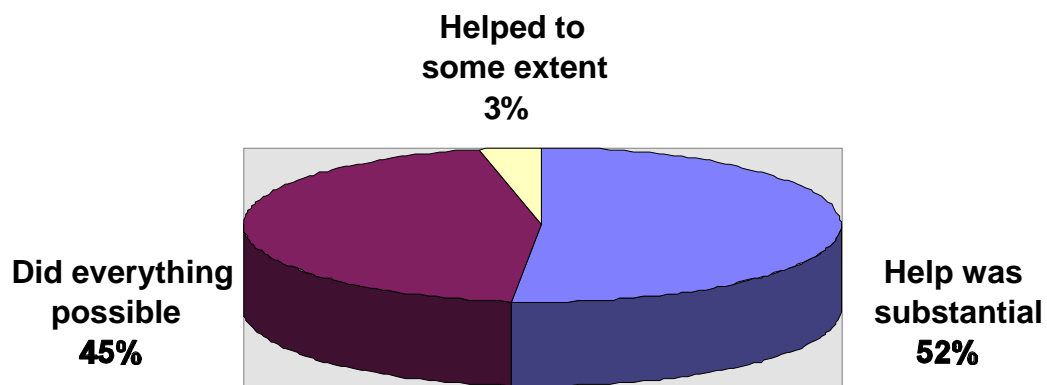
"Are you aware of the existence of the Zlatograd CDC?"



A further encouraging response for the CDC was the answer to the question whether the CDC had helped enough in overcoming the consequences of the 1996 flood: 52 percent of the interviewees considered the help of the CDC to have been very substantial, and 45 percent believed that the CDC did everything possible, although more

help was needed; the final 3 percent think that the CDC helped to a certain extent (see next pie-chart).

“Did the CDC help enough in overcoming the consequences of the 1996 flood?”



Regarding the advantages of the CDC, a more precise scale was used with citizens as compared to the same question asked to other focus groups. The aim was to learn not only how citizens supported each issue, but also the scope of importance to the populace. The answers are shown in the chart below:

Advantages of the CDC named by 30 citizens of Zlatograd

#	Advantage	Public support (No. of people supporting)	Average importance (scale of 1 - 4) (only among supporters)
1	Professional approach	24	3.6
2	Access to external advice, including foreign	17	2.5
3	Publicity/ popularity of the CDC	16	3.2
4	Access to diverse information at all levels (including national)	15	3.9
5	Capacity to attract and distribute financial assets	8	3.2
6	Access to similar to the CDC organizations' experience	3	1.7
7	Efficient cooperation between the CDC and the Municipality	0	0.0

The responses to this question are particularly important for determining the CDC's client base. The "professional approach" is obviously highly appreciated, and has come to be expected by users of the CDC. Surprisingly, "access to external advice", despite being considered an important asset by a large client base, was considered of less importance than other advantages of the CDC.

"Access to information" was valued highest among the CDC's supporters with the rating of 3.9. Another highly valued area of work was the "capacity to attract and distribute financial assets". These two areas of informational and financial assets form a sound base

for future development of the CDC. Another unexpected response was the lack of understanding among citizens of the need for sound cooperation between the CDC and the Municipality.

Regarding the activities that the CDC should undertake to be most helpful to the Zlatograd community, they were rated by citizens as follows:

- To “serve as a center for strategic planning of local development” and to “attract foreign investment” (15 percent each)
- To work closely with private business (14 percent)
- To serve as informational data bank (13 percent)
- To serve as a forum of citizens’ ideas (11 percent)
- To liaise between the Municipality and the citizens (6 percent)

Supporting the above questions were responses to a question regarding expectations for improving the quality and enlarging the scope of the CDC services. The opinion that the CDC should seek broader assistance from external experts, including foreign consultants, as well as concentrate on attracting foreign investors and business partners, was given in 24 answers. Following this was the development of the CDC communication and technical equipment (16), third, increasing the number of employees (11). Once again, closer cooperation between the CDC and local government was not regarded as an important tool for development of CDC status.

To further develop the results of the survey into a more strategic plan for community development, the last question asked what changes should be made in the CDC in order to enhance the development of the Zlatograd Municipality. The answers lead to more or less the same conclusions as the ones stated above:

- Greater publicity of the CDC activities (21)
- External advice (19)
- Important community issues to be solved through public involvement, open discussions, etc. (18)
- Increased financial and personnel capacity of the CDC (9)
- The CDC, jointly with the Municipality, should construct a clear mechanism to identify problems and assign them to a specific body, Municipal or other (6)



III. Analysis Conclusions

The results of the survey will be considered in preparing the CDC Business Plan Extension. Still, since opinions about the mechanisms and extent of cooperation between the CDC and Municipality are controversial, we must state two conclusions:

- ! The CDC has already gained substantial trust and recognition by citizens, in spite of its short existence. They have done this as an independent organization (NGO) which is working for the community without being associated with official local government structures. This is an important sign of the CDC's efforts and demonstrates that they have achieved one of their major goals.
- ! The CDC and the Municipality have been working together, and they must present more information to the public regarding their mutual efforts and joint initiatives. Obviously there exists a kind of positive "division of labor" between the Municipality and the CDC, but a cohesion between the efforts of the two organizations should also be forged, and more importantly, the community should be more aware of this cohesion and the advantages it will bring to Zlatograd.